XIO3

Nov./Dec. 1993

A Newsletter produced by the Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts, 1003 Amphion St, Victoria, B.C. CANADA V8S 4G2

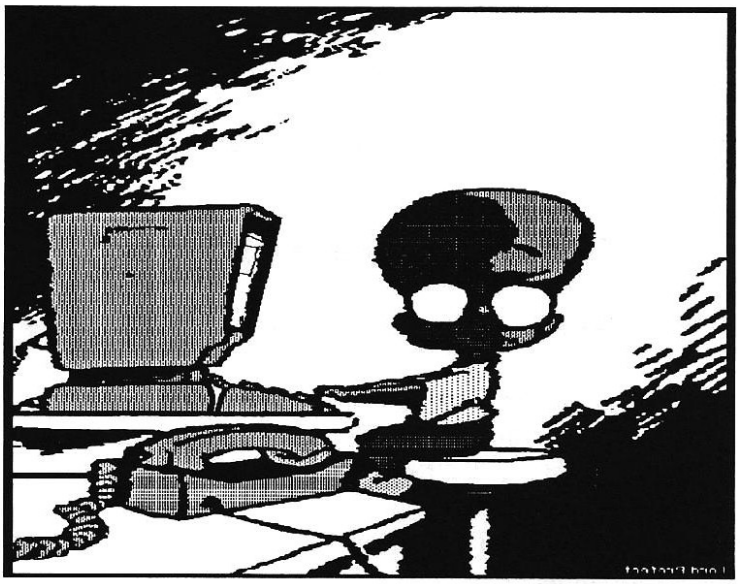
Editor's Mumblings...

Here is the last newsletter of the year. There are alot of articles in this issue ranging from the usual reports from GCACE members to software reviews like Mark Erickson's review of NAMEGRAM and Ted Skrecky's article of titled "Text Pro and Fancy Disk Labels".

On another front, I had the opportunity to speak with Darek Mihocka, Inventor of GEMULATOR. GEMULATOR is a expansion board and software that makes it possible for an IBM or compatible emulate a ST. I told Darek that I was interested in the GEMULATOR and he said that if we could pull together approx. approx. 30 people, he would come to Victoria and demonstrate it to us and also answer any questions that you might have. He will also bring some GEMULATOR boards up with him to sell to the attendees at a 'discount'. Since Darek has offered to come up, I am gathering names and phone numbers of people are interested in attending. If you are interested send e-mail to me (Chris Sherwood) on the following BBS' in Victoria: CC:ST BBS, The Pothole BBS or Big Blue & Cousins BBS. If you do not have access to any of the BBS' mentioned but have Internet access, my internet address is uf044@freenet.victoria.bc.ca or you can call me at 385-7528 (leave a message with your name and phone # if there is no answer).

Please note that this demonstration is not limited to GCACE members, so if you know of anyone that might be interested in the GEMULATOR, let them know about the demonstration. I am hoping to get Darek Mihocka up here for the February or March meeting.

Chris Sherwood
Editor, XIO3



Could this be Ted Skrecky as a baby?

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25.00 per year for family memberships. Membership includes a subscription to the club newlsetter, XIO3, access to over 300 8-bit and 100+ ST disks, and if you are into telecommunications, increased time and upload/download ratio on the official club BBS, the Pothole BBS, (604) 642-6795, 3-2400 bps, 24 hours, 7 days.

MEETINGS

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month except December at the Saanich/Victoria Branch of the Victoria Public Library. Meetings start at 7 pm and usually run until about 9 pm. Copying of club disks, both 8-bit and ST usually takes place at meetings, unless the librarians cannot make it with their machines.

ADVERTISING IN XIO3

Members can place classified ads (ie: Buy, Sell, Swap) for computer related products free of charge.

Commercial advertisments must be submitted as camera-ready artwork and be pre-sized. Please mail the artwork along with payment in full to Garden City A.C.E. care of the editor. Newsletters are published in January, March, May, July, September and November. The deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month in which the newsletter is being published.

The rates for commercial ads are as follows: Full page - $15.00. Half Page - $8.00, Quarter Page - $5.00, Business Card - $3.00. Please call the Editor for additional information.

Peeking Around

by Gordon Hooper

... Welcome to new member NOEL BLACK. MARK STRANG has renewed his membership. Another new member, GREG MYERS, has a Falcon which has been built into an IBM tower and includes a floptical drive. I particularly liked the built-in talking clock, which tells you the time in a sexy, female voice. I really am turning into a computer geek, aren't I? ... GEORGE ROSE hosted the social gathering at his house September 19th, which included JOHN PICKEN, MORGAN STEWART, BUD MAINDONALD, BOB ETHERIDGE, BOB SHUBROOK, MIKE HARRISON and myself. Very enjoyable, thanks George. The next social is scheduled for January, and will be announced in the next newsleter ... Don't forget the logo contest. We need one to be used in the newsletter, membership cards and letterheads. It would be preferable on disk, but hand-drawn entries are also eligible. Entries must be received by the November 18th general meeting. Prize is a one year extension of your membership and a commercial drawing program (Easydraw or RAMbrandt, depending on what computer you have), so get busy and draw your brains out ... JOHN PICKEN has received a king-size headache beating his sports brain against the brick wall. This happened when his beloved Ottawa Rough Riders achieved a CFL record in frustration by playing a full 60 minutes and only scoring 1 point. Makes them sound like the Seahawks, doesn't it, BOB NEX? I won't embarrass Bob by mentioning the Seahawks record this season. I modestly ask them to note that the B.C. Lions will be in the playoffs this year, and didn't need other teams losing to slide in the back door of the playoffs ... JACQUIE NEX tells me her and Bob's baby is due December 31. Trust Bob to aim for having the child born on Christmas day ... The CyberFuehrer (our librarian TED SKRECKY), has been kept busy managing the message bases on the Pothole BBS (642-6795). Charley sends his regards, Ted ... BOB SHUBROOK tells me he is working too hard, but I guess that's better than not working at all. Hang in there, Bob ... MORGAN STEWART looking for a new political party to join after his suffered a massive voter rejection. Of course, my party also suffered a massive rejection, but at least it was the right party. This item will probably cost me my membership on his board, CC:ST at 598-9953. I put the number in because the font our editor CHRIS SHERWOOD uses in the ad for the BBS makes it hard to distinguish 5's and 3's. Yes, people have phoned me asking for the number. Chris also sold me his hand scanner, so I'll be going nuts with my camera taking pictures of club members for inclusion in the newsletter. Remember to smile. Thanks to Chris for hosting the November executive meeting ... DAN CLIFFORD is looking for people interested in 68000 assembly. If you are, phone him at 380-9685 ... As usual, I close with the request for news of the dirty deeds perpetrated by naughty GCACE members. Phone GORD at 386-0857 and I'll announce them to the world ...

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Atari News & Rumors

by Rowland Grant

Atari will have to turn its fortunes around soon before it disappears. Second quarter sales were $5.7 million compared to $23.3 million last year. Atari also picked up half a million from other sources. Atari's operating loss was $4.0 million, down from $45 million last year. Adding a currency exchange loss of $3.1 million, Atari declared a net loss of $6.6 million, compared to $39.7 million net loss last year. At its present rate of decline, Atari might be down to one million in sales for the second quarter next year. Of course the Tramiels are betting that the Jaguar game machine will be a winner, and have $35 million in cash available to launch it. To make sure, Terrence Valeski has been appointed Atari's director of marketing and advertising. Terrence was a senior VP of Mattel Electronics and a founder of Intellevision. He should know the business of marketing video games and machines. Atari reports that the pilot production run of Jaguars was on schedule and that 50,000 units should be available for the holiday season in the selected marketing areas. Photos of the Jaguar console and controller have been released. The console is surprisingly compact. It has an attractive futuristic design, quite unlike any of its competitors. The stock market is reflecting the Tramiel's optimism. From a low of fifty cents in April, Atari's stock has slowly risen to $8.75 in October. With trading volumes of up to five million shares, Atari (listed as ATC) has been at the top of the American Exchange's most active list. At the same time there are persistent rumours that the Tramiels might sell Atari. If the Jaguar is a success, the Tramiels could receive some attractive buyout offers. Never a dull moment.

Bob Brodie mentioned that custom chip production was the limiting factor in the number of Jaguar consoles that will be available. This brings up the availability of raw materials. All integrated circuits are sealed in a little block of a special epoxy resin. Over the years, the Sumimoto chemical company got control of sixty percent of this chip resin market. Then a few month ago, its little resin plant inconveniently exploded and burned to the ground. Believing that chip production would be reduced dramatically, speculators began hoarding RAM chips and drove up prices somewhat. Custom chips would be particularly vulnerable to a shortage of the special resin. Sumimoto approached a supplier in the U.S. that had an epoxy plant sitting idle. However, the U.S. supplier wouldn't start up its plant for a limited time, and demanded a five year contract from its old competitor. I don't know what the outcome of that was, but if there's money to be made, the other epoxy suppliers will probably meet the demand fairly promptly. I understand that Falcon computer production will not be hampered, it uses few custom chips. Moreover, Apple cancelled a huge production order recently leaving a lot of chips available for other buyers.

There will be a "higher end" model of the Falcon, according to Bob Brodie, but that is all that he could say about it. The 14MB boards for the Falcon have been back ordered (chip shortage?). However there are a number of substitutes. The most recent is the FalconWING board now available in Britain, it uses SIMM boards. Apparently there is a good supply of 1MB Falcons which means a future market for these upgrades. Bob Brodie says that Atari will not be lowering its Falcon list prices, although dealers seem to have up to $200 leeway. Atari has not released any sales figures, but they are thought to be small. There are rumours that only about 2000 falcons have sold in the U.S. so far and 7500 inBritain. For every computer store selling Falcon computers in North America there are two music stores. A few computer stores may be doing well, one is rumoured to have sold over 600 Falcons. Either most other dealers have experienced poor sales, or the 2000 figure is too low.

In spite of the small market there is a steady stream of products for the Falcon. GE-Soft (Germany) is producing the Mighty Sonic Falcon Accelerator that uses a 50 megaherz 68030 and handles up to 128MB of fast RAM. There is also the Eagle Sonic Accelerator that runs at 30 megaherz. Wizztronics, a small company that made all sorts of gadgets for the 8-bit Atari's in the past has been supplying the ST market for some time. One of its latest products is the VES 2000 video editing system. There are a number of parts in this system. The first is the Video Frame Capture cartridge for the Falcon. This does 20 frames per second at 640X490 resolution with NTSC quality output. The complete system will be something like the Video Toaster that is so popular on the Amiga, but will have far more features. Steinberg-Jones, one of the foremost music software publishers has ported its Cubase Windows Score for the PC over to the Falcon. It is called Cubase Audio Falcon, and ships with a bit of hardware to adjust the sampling rate to 44.1 KHz which is standard for CD audio. I understand that Steinberg-Jones does use the multitasking available from Windows on the PC and OMS on the Mac but has found Atari's MultiTOS unsuitable for audio work. Atari itself is still improving GEM and MultiTOS. There are rumours that TOS 5.0 is now being beta tested along with a new version of MultiTOS. And finally, while Europress is not supporting development of STOS BASIC for the Falcon, the original authors have decided to upgrade the language for the Falcon as a private project. Good for them!

Sales of the Jaguar game machine are expected to begin a week after thanksgiving day in the U.S. Bob Brodie is starting the sales campaign with a news conference in New York on November 4th. There has been some publicity already. Video game magazines are starting to review the Jaguar (very favorably). Also a recent CBS This Morning program did a special on the Video game market. The Jaguar and 3DO systems were given

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considerable coverage. Apparently the Jaguar games looked just as good as those on 3DO. The Jaguar was mentioned in a feature article on video games in Time magazine (Sept 27). Every little bit of exposure helps. The retail price for the Jaguar, controller and one game will be $249 (US). Only cartridge games will be available initially. Atari plans to have a CD attachment for the Falcon by summer '94. This attachment plugs into the Jaguar's cartridge port. A composite RGB adapter may also be sold. The Jaguar will not be using a joy stick. The new controller is all push buttons something like the Nintendo system. Atari will sell versions of this controller for the Falcon. The Jaguar will be advertised mainly on TV in the targeted areas. Atari has retained Cunningham Communications to see to this. Unlike the Falcon, there seems to be no restriction on the distribution of the Jaguar. Atari has no objections to mail order and department store sales. And according to Atari, there is no problem finding distributors.

Atari released the names of twenty game developers who have signed up for the Jaguar. They are mainly in Britain and France such as U.S. Gold, Silmarils, Ocean and Loriciel. There are a few U.S. developers too, but until recently, most of the big software publishers in North America seemed to have been attracted to the 3DO system. Now there are rumours that the big video game publishers have noticed the Jaguar and are giving Atari assurances that theywill support it. This is a big change. Third party game developers have been leery of Atari. One developer has said that "almost everyone in the industry has an Atari horror story ... they see the Tramiels as used car salesmen". Third party development will be crucial to the success of the Jaguar, after all, it's the software that sells the hardware. All the Jaguar needs is one great game. But great games are not easily created. They are as hard to produce as great movies, and take as long to finish too. A good game takes at least a year, sometimes more. Just as there are only a few film directors that produce one success after another (like Spielberg), so there are only a few top video game creators. I noticed Brian Moriarty was quoted in the Time magazine article. Eight-bit Atari users will remember Brian's excellent machine language games that he published in Analog magazine a decade ago, and the text advnture games that he wrote for Infocom. Brian, who is working on a game for Lucas Films, commented on the current trend of movie makers getting into video game production and expecting big money. Brian says "there are no killings (to be made) here".

Attendance was down this year at the annual Glendale Atari Fair. However sales were excellent. Most vendors sold out before the end of the fair, and there were lots of new products. I figure that the number of dealers supporting the ST/TT /Falcon line is dwindling faster than the number of users. So people go to these fairs to buy new software and hardware that they can't get easily anywhere else. Victorian ST users may be in the same boat soon. I understand that Tesseract software, the one ST software source left in town, will be dropping Atari at the end of this year due to the lack of sales. Tesseract has already found it necessary to drop Commodore and Apple software. Around here it looks like the PC clones have won. Anyway, back to Glendale, much of the new software on display is TT and Falcon compatible. For instance, Warp 9 screen accelerator is now Falcon compatible. Lexicore is selling Prism Paint 2, Oregon Research has released Personal Finance Manager Plus and Calc 3D. Straight Fax has been upgraded to version two. Migraph has released a colour hand scanner for the Falcon only. There is more new music software. QUARTET does four-voice music composition and sound sampling. REPLAY-16 is a 16-bit sound sampler in a cartridge. While Double Click software broke up, at least one of its fragments has re-organized. Kieth Gerdes has founded Trace Technologies to market Data Diet, Squish and Deskey. Alan Page developed a new terminal program for Double Click called STORM. Alan will now release it as shareware. Atari is busy too, apparently a revised version of Atari Works is being tested.

The TT has been fairly popular in Germany, and new products are comingoutf for it. One of these is the Cyrel Catamaran module that accelerates the TT to 45 MHz without replacing the CPU. Since Atari has not been producing TT's lately, GE-Soft has started making a TT clone. It is called the Eagle and sports a 68040 CPU running at 50 MHz. In addition to the regular TT features, the Eagle has DSP circuitry like the Falcon. The only Atari parts that it uses are the TOS ROM chips. Version 3 of the Gemulator has been released. This version of the ST emulator will handle sound (but not MIDI) if the PC has a sound board. It will also use the higher resolutions available from VGA monitors. Gemulator 3 can now run 1.44 MB drives and directly access up to 8 MB of RAM. The Gemulator seems to be moving towards TT capability (except for speed), and the only Atari parts that it uses are TOS chips. To change the subject a bit, AtariUser magazine ceased publication a while back. I understand that it is being revived, and an issue of AtariUser is due out in October. Atari Unitedis putting together a disk magazine which it intends to release in October also. Considering the comatose performance of Atari in the computer market over the last year, the vitality of the third party software and hardware producers (and publishers) is amazing.

Basic and all that (Part 3)

by Rowland Grant

Atari waited until a BASIC language cartridge was ready for its new Atari 800 computer before showing the computer to the public in 1979. Atari Corp may have expected to do the same when it launched the ST computer. Unfortunately, when the ST appeared at the spring CES show in 1985, ST BASIC was not ready. Software development seems to have been in the hands of Digital Research, the creator of GEM. The only language that was issued with the ST in 1985 was ST LOGO, an adaptation of DR LOGO. While this is a rather extensive version of LOGO, it was hardly an adequate substitute for BASIC. Finally, ST BASIC was released in 1986. It was a great disappointment.

Oh, the general design of ST BASIC isn't all that bad. It is based on the Microsoft model and is fairly complete (with the strange omission of INKEY$). ST BASIC has graphic and sound commands, and provides a means for accessing the various GEM functions. But to many users in 1986, it paled in comparison to its 8-bit predecessor. The early 520 ST models had TOS in RAM. When all 138K of ST BASIC was loaded there was scarcely any memory left (about 5K) for a program. Users remembered that Atari BASIC took up 8K and left more than 30K for the program. Of course, when TOS was put into ROM chips, the size of ST BASIC became less of a problem. But ST BASIC has other deficiencies. ST BASIC programs run very slowly. In fact they don't run much faster on a 8 MHZ ST than Atari BASIC programs ran on a 1.7 MHZ Atari 800. There are numerous nasty bugs. For instance if you assign the value 18.9 to a variable, like X = 18.9, you get an error message. Multiples and fractions of this number can cause bombs on the screen and subsequent lock-ups. But perhaps the most frustrating thing about ST BASIC is its programming environment.

ST BASIC makes full use of GEM windows and drop-down menus. Indeed there are four windows. One for the command line, one for listing the code, one for the editor and one to display the output. Programs are supposed to be typed in the command window. This uses a primitive line editor. There is no cursor control between lines. If you find that you have made an error after typing in a line, you have the option of completely retyping the line or going to the editor window to make a detailed correction. And the editor has some annoying peculiarities too. This is a far cry from the 8-bit Atari BASIC environment where everything can be done on the same screen, and corrections are made with the movement of the cursor. Users of Atari BASIC were spoiled! Fortunately, ST BASIC saves its code in ASCII, so you can use another text editor if you want to. I did this and found that ST BASIC would load my text file of BASIC code, report when it found errors, and keep on until the whole file was loaded. Of course I had to write down the line numbers of the errors to make corrections.

So there it was, bulky, bug-ridden, slow and awkward. Otherwise, ST BASIC wasn't too bad. Atari was embarrassed, and got Metacomco to remove the bugs from ST BASIC. This took until the end of 1987. However, while it was at it, Metacomco reduced the girth of ST BASIC, doubled its speed and added a number of new commands. In this enhanced version, integers were doubled from sixteen to thirty-two bits. The change in integers could cause problems with some code written for the original version, as I soon discovered. Unfortunately Metacomco didn't do anything about the programming environment. I found that if you ran a program that caused error messages, the ST BASIC GEM windowsmight freeze. There was nothing to do but go to desk top and rerun ST BASIC. Sometimes it was necessary to reboot the computer. In two tries, Atari had failed to supply an acceptable BASIC for the ST. By 1987 the market was wide open for alternatives. There were several better BASICs on hand.

Shortly after he published TurboBASIC, Frank Ostrowski received an offer from GFA Sysytemtechnik to write a better BASIC for the Atari ST. GFA is a well established software publisher in Germany. After experiencing ST BASIC's GEM programming environment, Frank decided to have nothing to do with GEM windows. Besides, he felt that it is almost impossible to create non-GEM programs within a GEM environment. So he created a fast and powerful screen editor, one that could be used without a mouse. A separate command line screen is used only for running and testing code. The code itself requies no line numbers, although this limits it to one statement per line. GFA BASIC is much larger and more powerful than ST BASIC but it takes up a lot less memory. This is because Frank does all his programming in assembly language, while ST BASIC was cobbled together using C language compilers. The command set of GFA BASIC is equal to the best versions of BASIC on any computer. GFA BASIC lends itself to creating structured code. Like TurboBASIC before it, GFA Basic makes use of the PROCEDURE .... RETURN command. However in GFA BASIC it is possible to pass parameters to procedures and declare local variables within them. The GFA BASIC interpreter ran programs about five times as fast as the original ST BASIC. A compiler was developed which increased the speed of GFA BASIC programs by a further factor of ten. GFA BASIC has undergone continuous development. The current version (3.5) has an even more powerful command set and is twice as fast as its predecessor. Compiled GFA BASIC can match the code produced by many C and Pascal compilers.

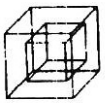
GFA BASIC became the standard BASIC for the ST almost as soon as it was available. Michtron marketed it in North America. It sold well in spite of an inadequate manual. The manual was improved, but the dealership was transferred to Antic. Now GFA BASIC is directly marketed by GFA in America.

Unfortunately, GFA is concentrating on the DOS and Windows market, where GFA BASIC is experiencing some success. GFA has moved out of the Atari market. A new version, GFA BASIC 4, is under development for the ST, but GFA and Frank Ostrowski are no longer directly involved. Before leaving the Atari market, GFA made a fine gesture. It declared the GFA BASIC interpreter, version 2, in the public domain. GFA BASIC remains well supported by the Atari community. Books are still being published about it, and there is a good deal of public domain documentation too. For an example of the power of GFA BASIC, try dbWriter. It was written and compiled using GFA BASIC 3.5. The elegant spread sheet GEMCALC is another example.

Now to change the subject a bit. You will recall the John Kemeny and Thomas Kurtz created BASIC to allow students outside the field of computer science to program computers. Some computer science experts felt that BASIC was too easy and allowed the development of poor programming habits. One reaction to this was the creation of Pascal, a highly structured language for computer science training. Stung by this criticism and concerned that BASIC was degenerating into a series of incompatible, machine dependent dialects, Kemeny and Kurtz created a new BASIC which they hoped would become a standard. They called their new BASIC "True BASIC" and set up a corporation to market it. True BASIC was first introduced for DOS microcomputers in 1984. By 1987 True BASIC was also available on Macintosh, Amiga and Atari ST computers. True BASIC supportsall the principles of structured programming, and indeed it sometimes looks a bit like Pascal. However, unlike Pascal, True BASIC handles data types such as integer and floating point numbers automatically. True BASIC also has a rich and somewhat unique set of graphics commands. There are user-defined graphics coordinates so it doesn't matter what kind of monitor display you are using. In True BASIC, graphics images are programming "objects" that can be moved about the screen, expanded or shrunk, and rotated using a few simple commands. There are extensive math commands including matrices. The language supports libraries of sub-routines, functions and modules that you can create yourself. In addition True Basic Inc provides libraries for advanced math, statistics, business, graphics and communications.

On the ST, True BASIC uses a GEM based editor. Like GFA BASIC it doesn't need line numbers. The editor is a programming environment with drop-down menus. . The programming environment can be expanded to include selected code libraries. This effectively expands the language for special purposes. I found the True BASIC programming environment very easy to use. True BASIC is not directly interpreted line by line. The program is written first and then compiled into efficient tokenized code. This code is run by a special interpreting program. A linker is supplied that links True BASIC tokenized code files to a runtime package to form a stand-alone PRG file that will run under GEM. Unfortunately True BASIC does not have a compiler that creates native machine code. So True BASIC programs, though fast, are slower than fully compiled GFA BASIC programs.

One of the reasons for sticking to tokenized code is portability between computer systems. Compiled True BASIC code created on the ST can be ported over to a PC, and by linking the appropriate runtime package an EXE file can be created. The EXE file will run the same on a PC as the PRG file will run on a ST. I found a True BASIC program listing for the Amiga computer in an old magazine. It was a graphics demo. I tried the code on my ST, exactly as it was written for the Amiga. The resulting screen display was the same on the ST as the Amiga, even the colours were very close. One can create programs that directly use GEM routines using True BASIC. Indeed, a special GEM library is available. But then the programs lose their general portability. True BASIC is used in some colleges and universities as an introductory computer language instead of Pascal. A student can use almost any currently standard computer at home and return coded assignments that can be linked and run on whatever computers the university is using. True BASIC is supplied with excellent manuals, and a number of text books have been written for it as well. Unfortunately True BASIC never caught on among Atari ST users. It may no longer be available for the ST. Still, of the many versions of BASIC that I have encountered, the elegant and powerful True BASIC is my favorite.



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City Centre Plaza
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Atari-8 Affairs

by Rowland Grant

I have decided to start a special column for 8-bit news and views, that is if the editor will run it. I am hoping that other club members will agree to contribute to this column from time to time. Personally I don't like the term 8-bit, but I can't think of a better term to refer to all of the 400/800, 600XL/800XL, 1200XL, 65XE/130XE Atari computers. The recent news about the Atari Falcon computer and the Jaguar game machine has tended to overshadow news items concerning Atari 8-bit computers. Even in club news, 8-bit developments may not always get satisfactory coverage. Atari-8 affairs should consist of two sections: general Atari 8-bit news (and rumours) followed by our club 8-bit news. So here goes....

There are rumours that ICD is slowly disengaging from the Atari ST market. Whatever, ICD has definitely stopped supporting the 8-bit market. However ICD would like to sell the rights to its 8-bit software. Since this consists of Sparta DOS, MAC65, Action! and BASIC XE, let's hope that some kind (wealthy) enthusiast will buy them out and make this great software available again.

Atari Classics is a bimonthly magazine for 8-bit computer users. Our club has a subscription to it, as do several of our members. Initially, there were only about two hundred subscribers. Ben Poehland, the managing editor, wondered if he could afford to continue on a bimonthly basis. However, about forty new subscribers have signed up each month and now Atari Classics' circulation is over 500. This is a great help in the U.S. (and Canada apparently) since Atari Classics can now get second class mail permits. If the original subscribers all renew this year, Atari Classics can continue and perhaps add more pages. Atari Classics also puts out a disk three times a year. It was thought that there would be only about one hundred disk subscriptions. The New York members of Ol' Hackers Atari Users Group (OHAUG) agreed to prepare the disks. They underestimated the demand. Alex Pignato of OHAUG says that they will have to prepare and mail 320 disks for the next issue. A big job for a handful of volunteers. Ben Poehland works on Atari Classics in his spare time. He has regular day job too. Ben handles all the business affairs of the magazine alone, and he does so with impressive efficiency. But all this work must take its toll, and I understand that it has. Ben may be forced to cut back on his devotion to Atari Classics. Lets hope that others will be prepared to take on some of Ben's routine duties. Otherwise Atari Classics might go the way of PSAN and other fine Atari projects.

We exchange newsletters with OHAUG. The Ol' Hackers newsletter is on disk. It is very well put together and often contains software among the text files. This newsletter is posted on the Pothole BBS and back issues may be found in the 8-bit library. In addition OHAUG members have created a number of very useful program collections. Recently Ol' Hackers has issued a collection of calendar programs by Ron Fetzer. If you are really organised you can use these programs to plan your life up to a year in advance. Or at least you can avoid forgetting birthdays, anniversaries and the like. On the same disk there is also a program called Magic Cataloger for cataloging your software collection. Magic Cataloger is a further development of an earlier program. I've noticed that programmers of Ol' Hackers frequently issue software upgrades and improvements to earlier programs.

There has been a lot of support for Atari 8-bit users in England and Scotland. For the last few years, Robert Stuart has issued a disk newsletter called EXCEL for Atari 8-bit users. He also sold public domain software, and the sales subsidised EXCEL. Unfortunately PD sales have fallen off to the extent that Robert has stopped publication. Les Ellingham, publisher of New Atari User also sells commercial and PD software for 8-bit computers. He too has suffered a decline in software sales and has felt obliged to appeal to subscribers to support his Accessory Shop. A few years ago Page 6 magazine almost went under, but Les kept going on the proceeds of his Accessory Shop sales. He then merged with Atari User magazine to continue as New Atari User. Les has been forced to cut back on staff. He and his family now do almost all of the work to put out an excellent glossy magazine. Les can no longer afford to pay contributors in cash, but he does pay in kind. Gordon Hooper received a year's subscription, complete with disk for his last article in New Atari User. Don Bell of Bellcom has also noticed a great drop in his PD software sales. Don has issued his last 8-bit supplement. He will be taking no more orders for Atari 8-bit disks after December 31st this year. Bellcom will continue, but as a PD software source for Macintosh computers (sigh).

While one Scottish 8-bit disk magazine EXCEL has ceased publication, another one seems to be flourishing. This is FUTURA, issued by the North of Scotland Atari User Group (NOSAUG). In England, there is the TWAUG newsletter (Tynsideand-Wear Atari User Group). They have now more than one hundred subscribers to their magazine which they produce using TextPro and Daisy Dot. A disk of software goes with each printed issue. And in Wales, David Wyn Davies has started the Atari Classic Programmer's Club. David is trying to encourage programmers to get together and begin producing new software. He is offering some support services such as writing custom music and designing graphics. Britain is not the only source of disk-based 8-bit magazines. In Germany there are at least two: Top Magazin and ABBUC magazine (published in German of course). ABBUC is user group that is active in collecting and producing 8-bit software. A number of excellent games have been issued by ABBUC. These are not all public domain. Since ABBUC depends in part on software sales to finance operations, they have been discouraged to find that pirated

copies of some ABBUC copyrighted software is being advertised for sale in Britain.

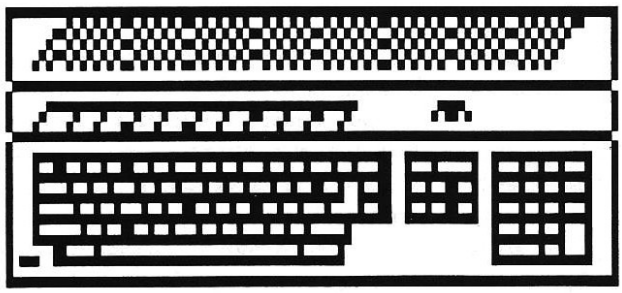
Ted Skrecky has continued his search for 8-bit software to download. All sorts of interesting programs have turned up. Ted has uploaded them to the Pothole BBS. Also Ted has received a number of 8-bit disks-of-the-month issued by Diablo Valley ACE. On one of these is an commercial quality golf game from ABBUC (copyrighted? dunno). We will be exchanging 8-bit disks with DACE (when we get organised). I notice that Doug Skrecky's fractal generating program Superhop is used by Stephen Wallace to create backgrounds for artistic illustrations. Stephen mentioned this in his desktop publishing article in the August Atari Classics. Thanks to Gordon Hooper, the club is getting copies of the New Atari User magazine disk. The label says to boot with BASIC. When you do so, you get an incomplete display. Apparently there is nothing wrong with the disk. The scrolling banner program that the disk is supposed to display does not run on North American Atari computers. The final word is from Atari's Bob Brodie: 8-bit? "We are still selling them, believe it or not, in some parts of the world - they simply refuse to die".

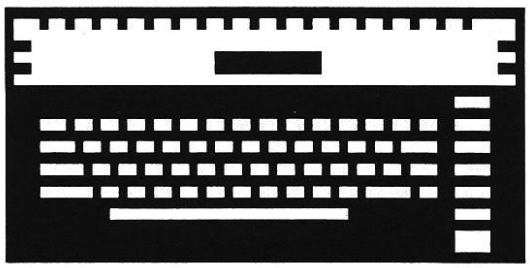
Club Meetings

by: Rowland Grant

In September the general meeting was supposed to feature Atari sound. We had arranged to have Brian Watts give us another of his inspiring MIDI demos. Unfortunately Brian was called away to Kelowna and had to cancel. So the meeting was opened to general discussion and library work. In October, John Towler and Morgan Stewart combined forces to give a talk and demonstration on using the GEM desktop, "TOS - Hints and Tips". I was unable to attend, but I have heard that the talk went over very well. John and Morgan spent some time organising and rehearsing. They had everything written out. Perhaps this could be converted into an article for XIO3?

We have received mail from other Atari clubs recently. We will be exchanging news letters with Miami Valley ACE of Huber Heights Ohio. MVACE seems to make much of its revenue from sales of its Disks of the Month and a book called "Secrets of NeoDesk". A lot of work is involved in putting out six disks a month, not to mention publishing a book. Another letter came from D. Ewens of the Tyne and Wear Atari User Group (TWAUG) in Newcastle England. They are an 8-bit only club. TWAUG publishes a large bimonthly newsletter and PD disk. All this work seems to be done by a handful of people (sounds familiar?). We will be renewing our club subscription to Atari Classics for another year. At present we also subscribe to Current Notes and New Atari User. Back issues are stored at George Rose's place. Ted Skrecky received a box of 8-bit disks of the month from John Dickerson of Diablo Valley ACE. Ted is supposed to be our ST librarian (and he is), but he has been doing a lot of 8-bit work lately. In addition, Ted prepared eight new ST disks in September. We have re-established contact with Bob Lussier in Vancouver. Bob is selling some of his spare ST software and hardware at attractive prices. A list of this is available and will be posted on the BBS.





NAMEGRAM:
anagrams from names

by Mark Erickson

Once in a while there comes a program which even in its simplicity can outmatch some sophisticated computer games. I only discovered that after decompressing NAMEGRAM.LZH from disk #117 of the GCACE library and running the program within. NAMEGRAM comprises of about 163k in 5 files, including two files for set-up in either medium- or high-resolution automatically.

When the program and data files have loaded, you are presented with a screen which 'asks': the name to be converted, the minimum number of letters per word and the maximum number of words generated. The default is minimum 1 letter per word and a maximum of 9 words in the anagram, and this allows for ALL possible combinations. However, this can take a long time to get to 'choice' anagrams, so I usually select minimum one third or one quarter total number of letters eg. for a 12-letter name (first and last names), minimum 3 or 4 letters per word; this cuts your generation time somewhat. You can also select minimum one half total number of letters and work backwards reducing the number of letters per word, especially with long names, to get interesting anagrams. The anagram's word order is random, so you will have to rearrange them for the best interpretation. Also, you can enter up to six names in a queue to be converted. This is more useful when printing rather than viewing on-screen.

I found that after generating humourous anagrams of my own name, I decided to test the names of people I knew around me. I generally used the commonly spoken name, i.e. if a person's name in full was Robert but everyone called him Bob, I would use 'Bob'. Strangely, some of the results 'fit' the persons if you interpret them that way. That's the fun part! You can then present them to that person in whatever manner seems fitting.

It's a good idea, like in other applications, to generate your anagrams on screen before on paper. I mistakenly opted to print all possible combinations of my mother-in-law's name (16 letters) before viewing. Well! Over 12 hours and 4000 combinations later, I decided to unplug my overheated system. I had to wade through papers to collect my printout. Hopefully, not many names create such havoc.

I must mention that the database of words from which the program draws upon is significant. I've dredged up words from it I wouldn't have thought of otherwise, words exceeding 5, 6, 7 or more letters. For example, 'rakish', 'hysteria', 'shortcake', 'hayrick', and 'snickered' are to name but a few.

Well, I suppose I should not conclude this review without mention of some anagrams of the names of some members of Garden City A.C.E. 'Gord Hooper' yielded 'hood groper'; 'Rowland Grant' gave 'rant and growl'; 'John Towler' generated 'jolt her now'; 'Morgan Stewart' gave 'rearmost twang'; 'Chris Sherwood' generated 'orchid showers'; and Bob Nex and Ted Skrecky yielded, uh, umm, er, nothing actually. Aw, but try them out for yourself. By the way, my name yielded over 700 combinations.

-"No sick remark"

Text Pro and Fancy Disk Labels

by Ted Skrecky

For the past couple of years, I have been producing fancy disk labels for our club 8bit & ST disks with the help of my Raven 24pin printer and my favourite 8bit computer language called Action! I was originally going to write an article about how to make these labels using Action! but there was one slight problem... Besides Rowland Grant, I am the only other person in the club with the Action! cartridge. Writing this article would have very limited appeal. However, many moons ago, John Picken told me that a very impressive 8bit public domain word processor called Text Pro was quite capable of making these labels. I decided to do some investigating and, with a bit of help from John, I soon discovered that creating labels with fancy borders was extremely easy to do with Text Pro.

With a majority of dot-matrix printers, there are one or more alternative character sets built-in which can be accessed by sending special commands to the printer. Most word processors do not allow you to easily access these character sets. I doubt anyone has used a word processor on the 8bit which allows you to type in some words, draw a fancy box around it, and then have the results sent to the printer. However, the really neat thing about Text Pro is you can "program" your printer to access the other character sets, making it possible to print double & single lines, special symbols and other neat characters on the page.

The first thing to do to achieve output of this nature with Text Pro is to activate one of the printer's alternative character sets. You can also change a number of other options such as switching the printer from draft to letter quality mode. Configuring the printer to your specifications is done by sending escape codes followed by a letter or

a number or both to the printer. To get the escape code symbol to appear in Text Pro's text editor, simply hit the ESCAPE key twice. This strange new symbol looks like a letter "E" with a letter "c" attached below it.

majority of printers have a draft and letter quality mode. On my printer, to select letter quality, I must send "x1" to the printer. If required, toggling back to draft mode is simple. All I would need to do is enter "x0". Some printers also have more than one font style. When I am doing labels, I prefer to

the same results. Feel free to experiment for as long as you like as it is not possible to damage your printer in any way by sending commands directly to it. I have yet to hear of a printer which has a self-destruct vector!

The "raw" data for the fancy disk labels.

Now, the fun begins! To start, you will need to open your bible, the manual for your printer, and look through the listings of Mode Commands until you find the section which deals with the activation of other character sets. In order to select an alternate character set with my Raven 24pin printer, the manual says I must enter a lowercase letter "t" followed by the number "1" after the escape code symbol. Since the Raven has 2 character sets, I must also tell it which set to select. To activate IBM character set #1, I must hit the ESCAPE key twice and then enter the number "7". Everytime you want to send a command to the printer, you must first enter the escape code symbol.

In this article, I have included a "dump" of the Text Pro screen which displays the "raw" info needed to create 2 different fancy labels. Please note that the very first line contains 5 printer commands. You already know what the "t1" and "7" do, but there is also "x1", "k0" and "U1". A

use BOLD PS. To activate this font, I must send "k0". If I later wish to change the font type, I can enter one the following numbers after the letter "k"... "1" for Sans Serif, "2" for Courier, "3" for Prestige and "4" for Script. The last command I have listed on the first line is "U1". This tells my printer to print in a single direction. It was John Picken who discovered, while reading a manual for an Apple Imagewriter, that print quality can be improved by toggling the printer into single direction mode. If a printer is printing in both directions, lines that go up & down the page will sometimes look a bit wobbly. With single direction, the up & down lines are always much straighter.

Now, I should mention all of the printer commands listed in this article are valid for my 24pin Raven printer but maybe different for your printer, especially if it isn't Epson compatible. If this is so, you will need to examine your printer manual and enter the appropriate codes to achieve

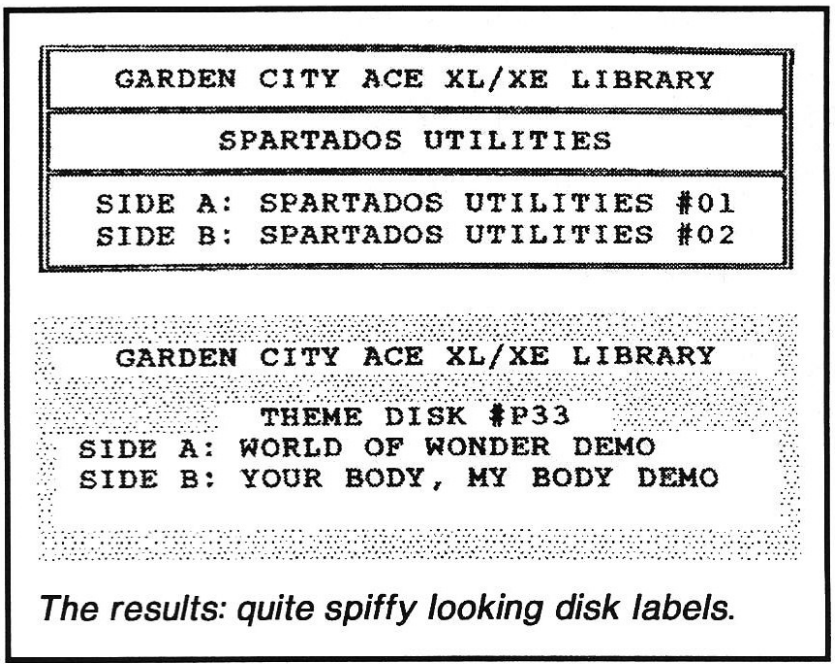
After having entered the first line, containing the escape codes which configure the printer, it is time to play at being an artist! In my printer manual, there is a chart which lists all the characters for the regular character set and a chart for each of the alternative character sets. In the regular set, all the numbers and uppercase/lowercase letters are repeated twice. The duplicate characters in the second half of the set are printed in italic. To use the italic characters, I must enter the required character in inverse in the Text Pro editor. To get an inverse character to appear on the screen, the SELECT key must be held down and then the appropriate key must be hit. Eg. Hitting SELECT and the letter "M" will give an inverse "M". When printed, this letter will appear in italics. The interesting bit is all the italic characters in the regular character set are replaced with nifty lines, various shaded boxes & symbols in the alternative character sets. On my printer, if IBM character set #1 is selected and Text Pro sends an inverse "M", it is printed as 2 parallel horizontal lines. By entering the correct inverse characters, boxes can be drawn around normal text. Take a look at the "dump" of the Text Pro screen and then examine the image of the resulting printout. Rather neat..... eh?

There is a little trick to getting the inverse characters on the screen to print as lines and such on the printer. The contents of the text buffer must be "written" to the printer. To save text to a disk, you would hit CONTROL-S and then type a filename. If you want to write to the printer, hit CONTROL-S, backspace out everything on the command line and then type "P:" and hit the RETURN key. The desired results will then be printed.

The disk labels I am using are 10cm X 3.5cm. As such, I find I can easily create a printed label containing 8 lines. Of course, if you are using a different sized label, you will not be able to use exactly what is shown in the example provided with this article. However, most of the fun to be had is in creating your own labels from scratch and then being amazed to find that the end product looks quite spiffy.

Getting the labels in the proper position for printing is a bit of a challenge. I do recommend starting by printing just one label. Several labels are usually wasted until everything is spot-on. Once everything is set, you can use Text Pro's copy function to make numerous copies of the same label in the text buffer. To copy the text for the label into the paste buffer with Text Pro, hit CONTROL-D. The command line will then give the following options: SWPF S=sentence, W=word, P=paragraph and F=find string. Each line should end with a carriage return so just repeatedly hit the "S" key for "sentence" until every line has disappeared from the screen and then hit the RETURN key. To get the lines to reappear in the text editor, hit CONTROL-R. Everytime CONTROL-R is hit, the contents of the paste buffer are pasted back into the text editor. Once the correct number of labels are in the text editor, the paste buffer can be "killed" by hitting CONTROL-K. You can then do a little bit of editing to change the regular text for each label. I do this all the time when producing labels for the latest batch of new club disks.

I hope 8bit users who own printers will find the information in this article to be of some use. I know, while doing research for this article, I made one very important discovery and that is Text Pro is indeed a most impressive word processor! I have been doing most of my word processing on the ST for the past few years so I wasn't aware of how good Text Pro really is. I would like to thank John Picken for helping me a bit with Text Pro... I found it easier to phone him and ask questions instead of reading the enormous amount of docs that come with this program. Of course, I really should read the docs someday especially since Text Pro has all sorts of very powerful macro features which I haven't seen much of on the ST. I would also like to thank Rowland Grant for helping me. I borrowed his Xformer 8bit emulator along with the cable which made it possible for me to do a screen dump of the Text Pro text editor, containing the "raw" data for the labels. Also, as utterly amazing at it is, I should also thank President Gordon F. Hooper for his contribution to the cause. He used his brand new hand-scanner which he had just bought from Chris Sherwood, "The Man from XIO3". Gordo scanned the printout of the two disk labels which were done with my 24pin Raven.



The results: quite spiffy looking disk labels.

8-bit/ST/Falcon Library Report

by: Ted Skrecky

I just recently bought a new computer. Yes, I have finally upgraded from my Atari 1040STf to an Atari 130XE! However, don't worry, I will not be abandoning the ST platform yet! The main reason I purchased the 130XE is because I wanted a computer that would give a good video display on a TV set. I had a Commodore 1802 monitor but, due to poor construction, it vapourized itself after a few years of use. I then tried using my 800XL on a TV and discovered the RF modulator needed adjusting. I opened the 800XL and tried changing the settings but I encountered a problem. The adjustment screws were very fragile and, hence, I had little difficult in pulverizing them into dust!

Since I have several VCRs, only one which works properly, I decided to use the monitor port on my XL to connect to the video and audio ports on one of my VHS tape muncher machines. I then connected the VCR to my TV. I found I could get a picture on the screen but it was fairly degraded. This is when I decided to pay $25 to get a 130XE. I connected the TV to the RF modulator on my new XE and discovered that the XE also needed some adjustments done to its video signal. Since I had just

destroyed the modulator on my XL, I was reluctant to start playing with the XE. Just for the hell of it, though, I connected my XE via the monitor port to the VCR and was shocked to see a really good picture on the TV set. Atari Corp obviously did some improvements to the video circuitry when they made the XE because it is vastly superior to my old XL. Looks like my 8bit computer system is back in business!

There have been tons of donations to the GCACE magazine library over the past few months. Douglas Skrecky donated the following: July 1993 issue of Dr Dobb's Journal, May 1991, November 1991, December 1991, January 1992 and March 1992 issues of ST Action, December 1991 issue of ACE and the June 1993 issue of ST Format. Ted Skrecky (that's me!) also donated the following: June 1990 and April 1991 issues of Atari ST User, January 1987 and Febrary 1987 issues of ST-LOG, September 1993, October 1993 and November 1993 issues of Atari ST Review, October 1993 issue of ST Informer and Spring/Summer 1992 issue of Toad Computers Spring catalog. All of these magazines are available from George Rose, the Magazine Custodian and 8bit Librarian. To borrow any of these issues, all you need to do is phone George at 652-0572 and make an appointment to visit him. George works strange hours so you may have to try phoning him during the day or in the evening. However, don't try phoning him at 2 o'clock in the morning because you might be unlucky enough to be greeted by your worst nightmare at the other end of the phone. Not even GCACE executive members know whether or not George undergoes an unearthly transformation after the clock strikes twelve midnight!

Activity in the 8bit library has been very intense lately. I have been using my ST and my Victoria Free-Net BBS account to aquire large quantities of 8bit files from the University of Michigan's BART file server. Unfortunately, the BART catalog of 8bit files doesn't contain any descriptions. I did give a copy of the catalog to Vice President John Picken and he has been going through it and marking the names of files which could be of interest. Every few days he gives me a "wish list" and I go off and get the stuff. I then use the Pothole BBS filemail feature to directly send all the files to John. He downloads them, unarchives them, and inspects the programs. Some of these 8bit programs are real gems. One file I gave John contained the machine language source code for MyDOS version 4.51. We currently have version 4.50. The new version has many bug fixes. John used MAC65 to compile the source code and, voila, we now have a runable copy of 4.51. Another neat program I got for John is a very old but very useful disassembler. John found that it only worked on the old Atari 800 computers but, since John is an expert hacker, it wasn't difficult for him to alter the program so it would work on the newer XL/XE machines. There are lots of other good files for the "classic" Atari computers that have been pilfered from BART and you can find all of them in the GCACE 8bit file area on the Pothole BBS (642-6795).

It has been business as usual at the GCACE ST library. I am still aquiring ST files from BART and other sources such as our Vancouver contact, Bob Lussier. He recently sent us a large collection of ST disks. I haven't yet looked at any of these goodies but I will be doing so very soon. I believe in one of Rowland Grant's articles in this issue XIO3, Rowland mentions a new shareware terminal program called Storm, written by the author of the original Flash program. Well, I thought I would mention that I just scooped a copy from BART. I have had a quick look at it and so far and it looks like it could become the #1 shareware telecomm proggy for the ST. I will be examining this program in greater detail during the next few weeks.

Everest is a very hot commodity in the ST world these days. No, I am not talking about the mountain, I am talking about Everest, the ASCII text editor. This program is from Germany and I think it is wocka wocka wow!! Earlier this year, an English version was made but it contained at least one very nasty bug. When deleting large sections of text, the program would crash and burn quite frequently. Because of this, I have been using the German version until just a couple of months ago. A new English version has been released and it works! I picked up a copy of this edition from Morgan Stewart's Capoeira Circle BBS (598-9953).

Since Gordo, the President of Garden City A.C.E., has now purchased Calamus, a top-of-the-line DeskTop Publishing program, he has given the order to Das CyberFuehrer (that's me!!) to search the land and ruthlessly hunt down and capture all public domain & shareware Calamus fonts. Das CyberFuehrer hasn't disappointed El' Gordo. Quite a few Calamus fonts have been arrested and are now available for downloading from the GCACE ST file area on the Pothole BBS (642-6795). These fonts will also be making an appearance in the next issue of the GCACE ST catalog.

The Atari Falcon computer is a new machine on the market and, since here at Garden City A.C.E. we don't want to miss out on any potential members, it was decided we should create a Falcon specific PD/Shareware library. There are around 4 disks of files which club member Morgan Stewart has managed to aquire via his BBS network and I have gotten almost 1 disk full of files from BART. Since I don't own a Falcon, I can not test any of these programs myself so it is possible some programs do not work properly. However, I can read the docs so I shouldn't have any difficulty in writing descriptions for each file. No date has yet been set for the completion of the first edition of the Falcon catalog.

Club members Chris Sherwood and Dan Clifford have informed me that you can connect to Free-Nets from around the world if you have a Victoria Free-Net account. This costs nothing. I haven't had much time yet to explore this new information outlet, but I have successfully managed to get on the Ottawa Free-Net. They have an Atari Special Interest Group (SIG) area so you can actually talk to Atari users in Ottawa for free! There is currently talk about more Free-Nets jumping out of the ground around Europe. Right now, there is just one Free-Net is that area of the world and it is located in Finland. Yes, like Ottawa, you can connect to the Finland Free-Net for free if you are a member of the Victoria Free-Net (595-2300).

The Pothole BBS (642-6795) is still alive. It does occasionally have problems with crashing but it always comes back from the dead! The Pothole should be of great interest to members of GCACE. There is an IBM file area but most of the hard drive space is filled with files for the Atari 8bit & ST machines. A new file area was added a couple of months ago for the Atari Falcon. Just about everything you could need can be had on the Pothole. If a particular file you want isn't there, you can post a request in the General message base. Also, if any club member has any questions about Atari computers or about computing in general, it would be a great idea to post it in any of the Pothole's message bases. The Evil Triad, TYGRE (Gordon Hooper), jkp (John Picken) and The CyberLord (that's me!!) logon the board everyday. If we can't give you an answer, I am sure one of us would know the name and phone number of a person who could be of assistance to you.

Morgan Stewart's Capoeira Circle BBS (598-9953) has lots of new messages for Atari users to read. Morgan's BBS is connected to the AtariNet and NeST. For the month of October, his board was not receiving any new packages from the nets but Capoeira is now back in business. However, Morgan will not be automatically getting any of the archived ST files that come over the AtariNet. He has found it cheaper to get archived ST programs by accessing anonymous file sites in the Internet via his University account. There are no special privileges for GCACE members on his board but, if you want your access level to go screaming up into the stratosphere, all you need to do is give Morgan a donation! Five dollars would do quite nicely but I am sure he would also accept donations ranging up into the thousands of dollars!

There are a couple of new Atari ST games at Tesseract Software. One of them is The Patrician, a strategy economics game. The other is a Micropose game called Dogs of War. Dogs is one of those 3D combat flight simulators. Tesseract has also received a few new copies of ISHAR II. This is a highly rated RPG game (much better than ISHAR I) and it is rather popular. I noticed, after one week, there is only one copy left in the Atari ST section! As christmas is fast approaching, Tesseract will be trying to order in some more new Atari ST titles. If sales of Atari goodies do well over the christmas season, Tesseract will continue to support the ST in 1994. Oh yes, I just about forgot to mention this.... Tesseract has reduced the price on a fair number of ST titles. Lemmings II is now priced at $40. I also remember seeing Lure of the Temptress priced at $35. Both are highly rated games. Worth having a look at, anyways.

That's all I have to report on for this issue of XIO3. As usual, I will end my column by mentioning that the ST club library is open for business at every club meeting. If there are any programs you want, just bring along some blank disks and I will see to it that they are filled with goodies!